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Rebecca M. Goldberg  
*Mississippi State University*

Andrea L. Dixon  
*Mississippi State University*

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# The Under-Representation of Jewish Americans in Multicultural Counseling Literature

Rebecca M. Goldberg  
Andrea L. Dixon

*Mississippi State University*

Despite the ongoing presence of Jewish Americans in the field of counseling, a large gap exists in the literature regarding Jews as a multicultural group of people. This article is designed to bring attention to the lack of inclusion of Jewish Americans in multicultural counseling literature and curricula. Recommendations for counselor education training and counseling practices are provided.

**Keywords:** Jewish Americans, multicultural counseling

Historically, in the field of counseling and therapy, Jews have played a significant role. Many of the founders of psychotherapy were Jewish including Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Albert Ellis, Fritz Perls, and Lawrence Kohlberg (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2011). Throughout the decades, such famous Jews as Carol Gilligan, David Wechsler, Abraham Maslow, and Viktor Frankl have added copious amounts of knowledge to the counseling field. Yet, as a group that represents one of the multiculturally diverse populations in the field of counseling, Jews are habitually omitted (Langman, 1995).

However, there are currently an estimated 6,452,030 Jews living in the United States (out of 308,745,538 people), making up 2.2% of the population (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In certain areas of the country, highly concentrated numbers of Jewish populations exist. For example, 8.4% of New Yorkers are Jewish (1,618,320 out of 19,254,630 residents), 5.5% of New Jersey residents (480,000 out of 8,717,925 people), and 5.1% of District of Columbia residents are Jewish (28,000 out of 550,521 people; American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2011). Like counselors, Jewish American citizens exist in every state across the country, yet a paucity of foci on Jewish Americans' counseling needs exists.

The purpose of this article is to elicit attention to this subject and to make recommendations for counselors working with Jewish American clients. Being multiculturally competent and acting with respect for all members of diverse populations are essential components to ethical behavior for counselors and counselor educators (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005). Thus, this article is an attempt to aid this effort and help counselors become more knowledgeable of the lack of representation of Jewish Americans in counseling literature and training curricula.

## Lack of Judaism in Multicultural Counseling Literature

Upon surveying five representative multicultural counseling texts (Dana, 2005; Korn & Bursztyn, 2002; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2002; Sue, et al., 1998; Suzuki, Ponterotto, & Meller, 2001), we found little or no mention of Jewish Americans. One researcher (Weinrach, 2002) surveyed 43 graduate multicultural counseling textbooks written between 1995 and 2000. Twenty-seven of the texts did not include any section on either Judaism or anti-Semitism. In searching through 20 years (1979-1999) of publications in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Weinrach (2002) surveyed 2,400 articles, only 72 of which contained information on Judaism and/or anti-Semitism.

Historically, multicultural counseling texts often address the following five groups of people: European Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic or Latino Americans, and Native Americans and Native Alaskans. One text (Sue et al., 1998) describes specific identity development models for African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino and Hispanic Americans. The other texts make references to such particular groups as Filipino Americans, Japanese American descendents of those interned during World War II, biracial Americans, and Cambodian refugees; however, Jewish Americans remain unmentioned. Although Judaism is a recognized ethnicity (Jews share social, cultur-

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Rebecca M. Goldberg, Mississippi State University, Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology, 175 President's Circle Box 9727, MS State, MS 39762 or at [RGoldberg@colled.msstate.edu](mailto:RGoldberg@colled.msstate.edu).

al, and religious heritage; Sue et al., 1998), it is often omitted from discussions of ethnicity in the counseling literature and only considered a religion. In addition, the U.S. Ethnic Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) classifies over 20 different groups of people including Hawaiians, Samoans, Guamanians, and Aleuts, but does not mention Jews. A recent article (Smith, Kok-Mun, Brinson, & Mityagin, 2008) reviewed 17 years of articles (1989-2005) in the *Counselor Education and Supervision* journal concerning issues of multiculturalism. Of the 460 articles examined, 78 were about multiculturalism; the authors mentioned articles concerning African Americans, Caucasians, sexual minorities, and disabled persons, yet there was no mention of Judaism or Jews.

Within the spectrum of multicultural counseling literature and counselor education curricula (e.g., conferences, coursework), it is apparent that Jews remain widely ignored (Langman, 1995). Little reference is made to Jewish issues or anti-Semitism (Arredondo & D'Andrea, 1999; Weinrach, 2002). The absence of addressing such an issue as anti-Semitism potentially lends to its inevitable continuation. It is widely known that various minority groups underutilize mental health services that are provided by the majority culture and the lack of representation of Judaism in the literature and curriculum only serve to further deepen this disconnect (Schnall, 2006).

## The Experience of American Jews as Multicultural Individuals

U.S. society puts great pressure on minorities to acculturate to the majority. To be accepted in Western society, Jews often feel forced to assimilate with Christians and risk losing their cultural distinctiveness (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005). Since ethnicity plays an important role in identity formation and building of self-esteem (Semans & Fish, 2000), to deny such could prove to be damaging to an individual. Anti-Semitic attitudes, both subtle and overt, still exist, which creates stress and anxiety for Jewish Americans. Alienation from the majority group can lead to feelings of depression (Semans & Fish, 2000). Within the Jewish community, great importance is put on intense valuing of Jewish identity; this is in direct opposition to the majority's pressure to acculturate and de-emphasize one's Jewishness (Oler, 1999). Many Jews hesitate to reveal their Jewish identity to others as a result of the history of violence and persecutions the Jews have faced (Semans & Fish, 2000). This legacy of fear is deeply embedded in the consciousness of Jews (Langman, 1995). Not disclosing one's Jewishness is a means of self-protection, but stifling one's identity can have harmful effects on an individual's self-image and self-esteem. Low scores of Jewish identity are associated with low self-esteem, while high levels of positive Jewish identity is associated with high self-esteem (Oler, 1999). Individuals who are ambivalent about their Jewish identity experience conflict and self-abasement due to the lack of identity resolution. This is reinforced by society's marginalization of Ju-

daism (Oler, 1999) and the apparent lack of social justice for these individuals.

Not all Jews embrace their ethnicity as a positive characteristic. There are Jews, like members of other minorities, who are self-loathing. Similarly, Black identity theories (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990) note a stage in which members choose to disidentify with their community. This involves condemnation of one's culture, denial of racism's existence or impact, and acculturation with the majority (i.e., adopting characteristics of Western culture) (Langman, 1995). Jews who engage in this type of self-hatred often feel embarrassment due to their Jewishness and reject their ethnicity. Some Jews who disidentify choose to do so by means of changing their names, hair color and texture, and accents that reflect their Jewish heritage as well as shunning the Hebrew and Yiddish languages (Gilman, 1991).

Some theorists (Cook & Helms, 1988) focus on physical differences when considering multicultural issues. Referred to as a visible racial and ethnic group (VREG), VREG represents an important distinction when considering observable differences between people's physical appearances (Cook & Helms, 1988). This becomes problematic, however, when a person's self-identification as a minority conflicts with the public's view of that person (Sue et al., 1998). This is common for Jewish Americans, many of whom do not consider their race to be that of Caucasian or White. In fact, Jews are often considered an assimilated non-minority (Langman, 1995). In the United States, the majority is generally considered to be White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Sue et al., 1998); rather than being amalgamated into this category, Jews often prefer to define themselves by their ethnic origin of Judaism (Langman, 1995). Society's generalization of Jews as part of the White culture creates an invalidation of their Jewish experience. Although many self-identify as being a multicultural minority, Jewish Americans receive the benefit of "passing" as White and many of the privileges that come with that status including invisibility or being able to blend in with others (Langman, 1995).

Pride in one's ethnic group and high self-esteem are reciprocally correlated as are anxiety about personal differences and low self-esteem (Oler, 1999). This means that as one variable increases, the other variable does, too; conversely, as one variable decreases, the other also decreases. Members of any racial or ethnic minority group that has been marginalized by the majority culture have attitudes toward themselves and others that have been shaped by their unique minority history and experience (Oler, 1999). The Jewish culture promotes collaboration and a strong sense of responsibility toward others, in part because of their history of oppression (Blech, 1999). Jews feel accountable for attempting to fight for justice and make the world a better place around them, a concept in Hebrew known as "Tikkum Olam" (Semans & Fish, 2000). Jews are supposed to perform daily mitzvahs, or good deeds, for others in order to promote world harmony (Blech, 1999). Jewish culture is one of collectivism whereby Jews feel responsible for each other (Blech, 1999). On the other hand, Western culture is

one of individualism; autonomy is lauded (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2008). The challenge that remains for the American Jew is to balance the pull from both ends of the continuum. Human personality has two opposing vectors: participation and separation (Schnall, 2006). Regarding participation, individuals identify with those around them and strive to fuse with them; conversely, they also have instincts that lead them to differentiate and separate from others and strive to sever the self from the surroundings. Counselors who intend to work with Jewish clients should be aware of this problem of balance that American Jews experience.

## Multiculturally Competent Counseling and Counselor Education

It is unreasonable to expect counselors to have extensive knowledge of all of the specifics regarding all clients' cultures; however, some knowledge is necessary for cohesive and effective counseling relationships. We suggest that basic knowledge of Judaism can easily be taught to counselors-in-training in multicultural and community counseling courses. For instance, traditions such as keeping kosher could be taught, meaning that Jews prescribe to strict dietary guidelines set forth by the Torah (Wigoder, Skolnick, & Himmelstein, 2002). In addition, certain foods are not considered to be clean enough to eat such as shellfish, birds of prey, and animals with cloven hooves that do not chew their cud (i.e., pigs) (Blech, 1999). Foods that mix both dairy and meat products cannot be eaten. Some Jews have separate sets of silverware, dishes, and even appliances (e.g., refrigerators, ovens) to keep meat apart from dairy in order to maintain their kosher diets. Another cultural tradition to consider when working with Jewish clients pertains to writing. When writing, many Jews do not write out the word "God"; rather, they write out "G-d" so as not to accidentally sin by defacing G-d's name by erasing it (Goldman, 2007).

Another Jewish tradition for counselors to be aware of is that of Shabbat, a time of rest commemorating G-d's day of rest after accomplishing creation (Wigoder et al., 2002). It is observed weekly from sundown on Friday night to sundown on Saturday night. During this period, observing Jews are forbidden to engage in activities that constitute work such as spending money, driving, or using electricity. In addition to Shabbat, certain holidays hold special importance for Jews. Counselors would benefit from knowing the significance of these Jewish holidays. The most essential holidays are Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), also known as the High Holidays or the High Holy Days (Blech, 1999; Goldman, 2007). In the Hebrew calendar, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur occur during the month of Tishrei. This corresponds to sometime during either September or October in the secular calendar (Blech, 1999; Goldman, 2007). The popular belief that Hanukkah is the most significant of Jewish holidays because it falls around the same time as the Christian's celebration of Christmas is erroneous (Blech, 1999; Goldman, 2007). Ra-

ther, Jews hold Yom Kippur specifically to be the most important of all holidays; it is a solemn day of fasting and prayer in which Jews ritualistically cleanse themselves of all the sins they committed over the previous year. When classes, exams, presentations, and conferences are scheduled during these times, Jews are forced to decide between following their religious beliefs, attending the event, or speaking up and attempting to change the date of the event (Langman, 1995). Doing anything other than attending the event forces the individual to call attention publicly to their Jewishness, something that not every Jew is comfortable doing. Pressure to forego their traditions and assimilate can lead to stress and pressure for Jews.

Above and beyond specific knowledge of Jewish tenets and practices, counselors, counselor educators and counselors-in-training would benefit from general knowledge of Jewish history (Langman, 1995). Jews have survived for thousands of years, and many Jews consider themselves to be an endangered group of people. They have suffered an existence rife with anti-Semitism, and that oppressive history should be taught to counselors so that their multicultural competence can be improved. The Holocaust (Bartov, 2000) in Europe during the years of 1933-1945 marked the most significant act of anti-Semitism in the history of Judaism. Multiculturally competent counselors need to know about the impact the Holocaust has had on Jews and the many generations of Jews to come. Also, it is pertinent to address the impact of the denial of the Holocaust's occurrence on the Jewish community. At least six million Jews were brutally slaughtered, yet to this day many insist that the Holocaust was a hoax (Powell, 2000). The pain the Jewish community feels in relation to this event is immense, and the denial only serves to deepen it. A client's religious upbringing and ethnic background have great impact on the choices she or he makes (Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003). Religion aids its participants by acting as a means to cope with life stressors. If a counselor has basic knowledge of his or her client's worldview, that counselor is usually better able to empathize with clients, promoting greater rapport and a more successful counseling environment.

It is extremely important to remember that there are great differences among members of the Jewish community, so counselors must be cognizant not to assume that all Jews are the same. Most modern Jews are considered Ashkenazic, although some are Sephardic (Gilman, 1991). The difference lies in the origin of one's family: Ashkenazic Jews originally come from Eastern Europe (i.e., Germany, Russia, Poland), while Sephardic Jews are from the Iberian Peninsula (i.e., Spain, Portugal) (Wigoder et al., 2002). The difference in geographic origin can translate to rituals and traditions that look very different from each other (Wigoder et al., 2002). Another distinction is the varying denominations among Judaism. Orthodox Jews exercise very strict observance of religious laws while Humanistic Jews are nontheistic and emphasize Jewish history and culture as the sources of identity rather than the word of the Torah, a written text of Jewish laws and traditions (Blech, 1999). Within the spectrum be-



tween Orthodox and Humanistic Jewish worldviews fall numerous other denominations, including Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews, each of whom follow religious tenets to varying degrees. Rich diversity lies within American and World Jewish culture, thus a full description of this continuum would be too cumbersome to include in this manuscript. In order to emphasize all of the varied differences that exist, a second article on the subject would be appropriate.

## Recommendations for Counseling Jewish Clients

It is important to remember that the term “Jewish” is a nebulous one. Some define it as a religion, others an ethnicity, yet others a culture (Langman, 1995). There are also those individuals whose denotation of “Jewish” combine all three definitions and consider it a religion, ethnicity, and culture amalgamated. Counselors should engage their Jewish clients in conversations delineating what being Jewish means to them. This process will benefit both counselors and clients, because counselors will have a better understanding of their Jewish clients’ worldviews while the clients’ verbal expressions of understanding of Judaism can help to solidify their self-identities as Jews (Oler, 1999).

Thus far, we have mainly addressed knowledge of Jewish culture as a function of multicultural competence and ethical practice for counselors. In order to be truly competent, it is also crucial that counselors explore and address their own prejudices and feelings toward Jews and anti-Semitism (Langman, 1995). Counselors should ask themselves questions such as, “Am I aware of anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviors? Do I hold any negative beliefs toward Jews? Do I contribute in any way to anti-Semitism?” If a counselor discovers that he or she indeed has negative feelings toward Jews, that individual should seek supervision and/or counseling in order to resolve the issue(s) so that clients are not harmed or negatively affected (Langman, 1995).

A valuable recommendation for clinical practice with Jewish clients is for counselors to become affiliated with key stakeholders in the community (e.g., rabbis, cantors, other temple and congregation figureheads) (Schnall, 2006). Doing so can create a sense of trustworthiness and legitimacy for counselors among members of the Jewish community making them more likely to seek counseling services from those individuals. By developing close working relationships with local rabbis, counselors can establish referral resources. Often, congregation members will ask their rabbis for guidance with personal problems, psychological or otherwise; rabbis are likely to refer their congregations to counselors that they know and trust (Schnall, 2006). In addition to establishing referral resources, counselors who ingratiate themselves with rabbis can benefit from their wisdom and counsel creating a consultation relationship. Consultants collaborate with and assist counselors in delivery of effective services to clients (Brown, Pryswansky, & Schulte,

2011). Consultancy relationships with rabbis can aid counselors by increasing their knowledge of working with Jews which decreases the potential for offending Jewish clients by lack of knowledge of their culture (Schnall, 2006).

Certain behaviors of religious Jews, such as washing and eating habits, might be misconstrued as obsessive-compulsive. Consulting with rabbis can help counselors determine whether actions are indicative of psychological distress or simply a reflection of religious observance (Schnall, 2006). For example, religious Jews laud ambition, competition, and constant striving to achieve goals (Sorotzkin, 1999). Judaism promotes the aim of *shleimoo*s, which literally translates to “wholeness” in English but is interpreted as meaning “perfection” (Sorotzkin, 1999). Within the context of Western mental health, perfectionism is often associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, narcissism, and depression (Sorotzkin, 1999). For counselors working with Jewish clients and the concept of *shleimoo*s, they would be advised to consult with rabbis as to the difference between pathology and religiosity.

The Jewish calendar is not consistent with the secular calendar, and many printed secular calendars do not report Jewish holidays. If a counselor chooses to display a calendar anywhere in his or her setting (e.g., school, agency, private practice), that calendar should either be neutral (i.e., free from all religious holidays) or inclusive of Jewish holidays as a way of being sensitive toward Jewish clients. It is important for counselors to be aware of Jewish holidays as they occur very frequently throughout the year. Scheduling a session, presentation, class (or anything of the like) during a Jewish holiday can be considered quite insensitive toward Jews. Hopefully, with the points highlighted in this article, counselors will be better equipped to address Jewish Americans in a culturally sensitive fashion.

## Recommendations for Future Research and Literature

In order to further expand the topic of counseling Jewish Americans and including them in multicultural counseling literature and curricula, more dissemination of information is needed. Multicultural researchers need to consider how they can become more inclusive of this underserved portion of the population. Counselor educators should consider ways in which they can address the needs of this client population throughout the counseling curricula (e.g., Counseling in Community Settings, Multicultural Counseling, and Family Counseling) and produce more knowledgeable multicultural-ly competent counselors.

## Conclusion

A society that truly appreciates multiculturalism is one that makes use of the diverse elements that comprise it (Sue et al., 1998). All resources are utilized and the contributions of all groups are valued. Differences are viewed as gifts to be

used as sources of enlightenment, knowledge, and growth for others. Learning about another's culture has the power to help an individual become more tolerant and accepting of people that are dissimilar to him or her. By integrating Jewish Americans into the multicultural counseling literature and curricula, counselors will be better able to serve their clientele, and counselor educators will produce more competent counselors. Rather than training mental health professionals in traditional networks of values, attitudes, and practices (which only benefit a narrow portion of the greater population), they should be exposed to ideas other than that of mainstream groups of people (Sue et al., 1998). To do otherwise creates a situation whereby harm may be committed against minority clients as a function of ignorance.

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